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How demand for security influence the shaping of foreign policy: Using the theory of securitisation to understand Armenia–Iran relations

Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu*

Department of International Relations, Giresun University, Güre Campus, Giresun, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the alliance currently developing between Armenia and Iran using the framework provided by the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory. Armenia is resorting to securitisation with regard to Turkey on the basis of genocide, and with regard to Azerbaijan through the Nagorno-Karabakh Question. Iran, meanwhile, is securitising Azerbaijan and Turkey within the framework of its own regional activities. Examining the relationship developing between Armenia and Iran, in terms of the theory of securitisation, will be helpful in revealing the psycho-social aspects of the tensions in this region.

1. Introduction

The South Caucasus is geographically located at the intersection point of the eastwest and north–south energy transfer networks and on the path of the historic Silk Road, now in the process of being revived as a channel of eastwest commerce. These are matters of direct interest to all global and regional actors, including principally the European Union (EU), Turkey and Iran. The situation in the South Caucasus reflects the systemic power struggle between the US, the leader in shaping the international system, and Russia, which has been recovering its strength and is now looking to establish a regional hegemony in Eurasia across the former Soviet territories in line with its "Near Abroad" policy. This competition very much informs the attitudes expressed by the states in the region to each another.

Demand for security will always be the most important factor shaping foreign policy, and this requirement has normally been examined using state-centred approaches, taking security to consist merely of a set of exclusively military issues. This study, by contrast, uses the assumptions of the social constructivist approach of the Copenhagen School with the assistance of a societal interpretation to examine "security" in the context of the alliance growing up between Armenia and Iran. It is important that security-oriented foreign policy discourse is analysed with due regard to the societal impulses which lie behind it, and the approach adopted here, in emphasising the link between societal demands for security and political security, provides a societal interpretation of an alliance which is normally considered only in military and state-centred terms.

The study surveys the conjunctural regional outlook in the South Caucasus and then goes on to summarise the ideas of the Copenhagen School concerning securitisation,

* Tel.: +90 (0)505 374 08 00; fax: +90 (0)454 310 13 50.
E-mail address: gktrkt@gmail.com.

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and examines the predictions made by this school about how securitisation is likely to operate. Finally, the alliance developing between Armenia and Iran will be examined within the framework of the security approach set out by the Copenhagen School.

2. A region riven by historical and systemic disputes: South Caucasus

The South Caucasus is not an extensive territory in geographical terms but it is home to a number of sharply differentiated ethno-cultural, historical, and societal entities, and is marked by a number of disputes arising between those entities which have become integral to the region's politics. For many years the entire area was part of the USSR, but its status changed significantly with the end of the Cold War. The significance of the South Caucasus derives from the network of systemic relations which developed after the Cold War (Cornell, 2010: 123–134). The US, looking to open up the economic and political fields in the Black Sea and Caspian basins, felt that its systemic hegemony was threatened by the developing multipolarity, and acted in concert with its ally the EU to transform the Southern Caucasus and bring it into line with their own systemic approach. The South Caucasus is the shortest route from Europe to Asia, avoiding Russia and Iran. The Euro-Atlantic Alliance has political disputes with both Russia and Iran, so the importance of the corridor stretching from Turkey to the South Caucasus can be readily understood. The systemic role of the South Caucasus is easy to appreciate when one considers that global actors such as Russia and China and regional actors such as Iran are all seeking to introduce a multipolar dimension to the international system which currently operates mainly according to the systemic values and hegemony of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance (Uzer, 2013: 69–93). Under circumstances currently prevailing, this region is located precisely at the breakpoint of this fault line. The competition which has been mentioned affects the foreign policy of the countries in and around this region, because their own prejudices about each other operate as catalysts which render the South Caucasus a highly conflicted region.

Of course, the most significant factor which places the South Caucasus firmly in the political limelight is energy (Wisniewski, 2011: 58–79). The region has petroleum and natural gas reserves which are important to the EU economy, and which reduce the EU and Turkey's energy dependence on Russia. The South Caucasus also provides an alternative route for the transfer of petroleum and natural gas resources from Central Asia and the Caspian Basin to the West, by-passing Russia. The Baku–Tiflis–Ceyhan Petroleum Pipeline, the Baku–Tiflis–Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline and the planned Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) projects are particularly significant in this connection (Rzayeva et al., 2012). On the other hand Russia, which is interested in keeping the EU and Turkey dependent in terms of energy, is not only applying pressure upon the EU and Turkey through various political and economic channels, but is also doing its utmost to draw the states of the South Caucasus closer to itself. In order to achieve this, it is exploiting wherever necessary the historical, ethno-cultural and political disputes between the various players. The efforts of those players to order the distribution of energy resources, far from promoting regional cooperation, are introducing a network of conflict-based relationships into the area.

South Caucasus may be a small region but it has a multiplicity of ethnic, religious, cultural, social and historical factors which have to be taken into account. These differences shape the societal and political perception of the countries in the region and increase tension. During the Soviet era, these differences were kept on ice by the ideological control imposed across the area by the governing authorities, but with the end of the Cold War these differences began to impinge in a way that significantly affected the political and regional outlook. These ethnic, religious and cultural differences gave rise to forms of deferred or "overdue" nationalism which arrived on the scene, with all their customary divisiveness, to entangle the South Caucasus. The wave of societal and political reactions first expressed itself in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and even Adjara, in Georgia, impacting on Armenia–Georgia relations via the Javakheti Question (Özkan, 2008: 211–248). Then came Armenia's occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh, with its significant Armenian population (and its Azeri population, now displaced). This issue, which revolves around precisely the historical, ethno-cultural and religious differences referred to, will be assessed here within the context of the Armenia–Iran Alliance.

The dense network of relationships growing out of this South Caucasus confrontation have generally been interpreted by the application of classical theories, but this study will take a different approach, assessing relations between Armenia and Iran in the context of their alliance using the premises of the Copenhagen School: a societal-based approach to security conceptualised in terms of social constructivist theory.

3. The Copenhagen School and the concept of security

The Copenhagen School arose as a reaction to traditional views of security (Özcan, 2000: 13–15).[1] Barry Buzan has described those who approach security from a traditional or realist direction as seeking to maintain what might be described as a broadly military focus. According to him, the ambition of the Copenhagen School, by contrast, is to offer a more critical and enquiring approach to the whole of that field conceptualised as "security." (Aktaş, 2011: 7–47) The Copenhagen School holds that security is the pursuit of freedom from threat by states and societies, measured by their ability to protect their independent identity and functional integrity against competing forces (Sandıklı &

[1] Security is dealt with in terms of military and political security on the basis of realist theoretical premises. Expansionary security, meanwhile, integrates ethnic issues, migration, economic and environmental security into the understanding of security. Thus, the spectrum of threats relating to the concept of security is broadened, and a multiplicity of subjects and problems are included under the scope of security. Expansionary security gives greater importance to human security than the security of the state, sees all matters which threaten the security of the individual as properly within the scope of security studies.

Emeklier, 2012: 39–40). This approach links society into the analysis so that security is no longer viewed as exclusively state-focused.

At the heart of the analysis proposed by the Copenhagen School lies the concept of securitisation. Securitisation is the characterisation of a particular item or issue as a threat directed toward a subject which is known or agreed to be of value, and the shifting of that characterisation outside the normal political process, thereby justifying the implementation of emergency measures. An attempt at securitisation may be entirely successful, successful to a limited extent or may indeed be entirely unsuccessful.

If a particular matter is declared to be a security issue by the élites who govern or lead society, it means that the matter concerned has been securitised, and thus removed from normal political process. Under this analysis, security is not viewed as an objective circumstance, but rather as a "speech act." If a matter is securitised by social élites or rulers, it suggests that the issue can securitised by the social élites or government in a manner that suits their particular interests or world view, which is to say that it can be legitimised in societal/political terms (Waever, 1995: 46–86).

The Copenhagen School examines security not only in the form of military security. Indeed, it proposes five main security sectors: military, economic, political, environmental and social. It was Barry Buzan who first articulated these sectors at an analytical level. These sectors do not actually exist in objective terms, but they are vehicles of expressions used for convenience at the level of analysis (Buzan, 1983). Buzan asserts that these sectors cannot be evaluated individually, and must be seen as processes which are intimately related to each other, with one process often triggering another.

The Copenhagen School suggests that it is essential to distance oneself from the perception that security is a positive and necessary requirement of society (Buzan et al., 1998: 23–25). It is precisely here that we see the considerable importance attached by the Copenhagen School to discourse. According to this approach; words, concepts, and even the dominant language of society have no objective or intrinsic meaning because all of these elements are understood in terms of the content which individuals and societies pour into them. It is essential to assess the meaning and content of the word "security" bearing these considerations in mind. The Copenhagen School holds that the idea that "security is always good and necessary" plays a critical role in the legitimisation of security-oriented policies. In their view, instead of believing that security is always good and necessary, one must retrieve issues from the security field and re-integrate them into normal politics. That is to say, it is their belief that a de-securitised consciousness must prevail in the societal/political arena (Aktaş, 2011: 12–20).

A number of structural factors must be in place in order to be able to implement securitisation effectively. Communication between the subjects is very important and this communication can only be effectively structured at the level of "discourse." (Brauch, 2008: 1–47) Securitisation is constructed not on objective foundations, but on the basis of communication between subjects. Indeed the authority and legitimacy endowed by security renders even an impossible threat plausible (Bilgin, 2010: 83).

When we consider matters which have been dealt with through the process of securitisation, the primary component that we encounter is the referent object or objects. The referent object is the entity of which is described as being under threat, and which must therefore be protected. Territory, sovereignty, and the fatherland are all examples of the sorts of objects which can be presented in this way. The secondary component we encounter is the securitising agent. This, as has already been explained, is an actor who attempts to achieve securitisation by stating that the existence of the referent object is under threat. Such actors may be members of social élites, the bureaucracy, politicians or other groups. The third important component of the act of securitisation is the functional actor. Functional actors are those who directly or indirectly affect the operation of the sector subject to securitisation. This may, for example, include companies who might directly or indirectly be affected by the securitisation of some aspect of commerce. These actors endeavour to manage the securitisation for their own benefit. One of the most important elements of the securitising approach is the target masses. Such masses to whom the discourse which constitutes the essence of the securitisation is addressed are the most important of all the actors, and the reaction they display to the discourse indicates the success or failure of the securitisation (Aktaş, 2011: 15–16).

According to Ole Waever, securitisation is a conscious and deliberate choice exercised by state élites and actors who are attempting to manipulate society (Williams, 2003: 511–531). That is to say, securitisation is used by élites to achieve certain objectives, to legitimise certain values or ideologies, and to obtain the acceptance of the policies those élites wish to impose.

Ole Waever considers that societal security is of prime importance in Buzan's sectoral analysis of security. Waever describes societal security as the defence of an identity against some other perceived identities. This form of securitisation, which is constructed within the framework of a them-and-us distinction, has a character which extends beyond state-oriented forms of securitisation. Societal security and political security are certainly interlinked, but there is an important distinction between them in that political security prioritises institutional stability and the ideological or administrative integrity of states, while societal security is the defence of an identity against a perceived threat. For instance, there are many examples of circumstances where the borders of states and societies do not fully or even nearly coincide. This is a common situation which impinges upon societal security and therefore requires close scrutiny. Assessment of such a situation exclusively from the point of state security would almost result in downplaying the identity-based security demands of stateless peoples and minorities (Waever, 2008: 154). If security is defined as the pursuit by societies and states from threats, and as their ability or capacity to protect their identity and group integrity against competitor or enemy forces (Buzan, 1991: 431–451), then societal identities are quite distinct from political institutions which deal in governmental or political power alone, and their concept of security is also going to be different, albeit connected.

According to Waever, societal insecurity occurs if any group perceives a development as a threat to its own existence, and this triggers an identity-based securitisation which is quite independent of state. The matters which are most commonly the subject of securitisation for such groups or communities, and which are quite separate from state security, are ethnic and/or religious differences (Waever, 2008: 155).

Ole Waever views the elements of horizontal and vertical competition associated with migration as the most important of the threats to societal security. Migration is important because when a group of people migrate to a region, they may, over the course of time and by reason of their population, come to exert political and economic control of that region. The Chinese in Tibet and the Russians in the Baltic states of Lithuania and Estonia are examples of this process. Horizontal competition emerges as a result of the growing impact of a group which has progressively increasing geographical and political clout, and may begin to affect elements of language and culture or other aspects of life in the region concerned. The spread of the American lifestyle in the context of globalisation is one example of this. Vertical competition, meanwhile, is the complete abandonment by a group living in a particular region of their former identity as a result of a regional integration project (such as the EU) or as part of a separatist project, and the adoption of another identity which may be broader (such as EU citizenship) or narrower (Bosnian Serb, Catalan, Kurdish etc) (Waever, 2008: 158–159). Each of these threats may be considered separately or in combination.

Of course, there is an underlying political objective here. Particular societal group may resort to securitisation, because it considers that the state in which it is living intends to homogenise its population. Forced migrations and ethnic cleansing operations witnessed throughout the Balkans after the disintegration of Yugoslavia emerged as part of a conflict of national identities securitised by states' demands for homogeneous population.

If one societal group's birth-rate falls while the proportion of another societal group's population increases, the societal group with the falling birth-rate may resort to securitisation. Meanwhile, the societal group with the rising birth-rate, if it is in a position of a minority within the country, may be confronted with forced migration pressures or policies applied by the state power under the control of the dominant group in order to halt that group's population increase, and this may in turn provide grounds for securitisation by this minority group.

If securitisation is not based upon a particular ethnic group, but is religion-focused, it can be quite functional in incorporating those societal groups who would otherwise be reluctant to mobilise on the basis of an ethnic identity. From this point onwards, religion will be used to reference a particular identity. As was witnessed in the Balkans after the breakup of Yugoslavia, people were forced to migrate or massacred, because belief served the purpose of a separator to define differing societal identities (Laustsen & Waever, 2000: 705–739).

One of the most important security elements which Barry Buzan and Ole Waever linked to their theory of securitisation was the concept of a regional security complex (Hettne, 2008: 90–96). According to this issue, security of every actor in a particular region is closely related to the security of others, so that balance of power can be understood through polarisation on a regional basis in the form of a regional security complex. The most important element determining the development of a security complex is the joining together of states and actors in the face of a shared threat. Such a threat may serve the development of relationships of mutual dependence between states. Factors such as historic relationship of amity or enmity, clashes, shared enemies and parallel needs play a primary role in shaping of a security complex. According to the theory of securitisation, a state may occupy a place in more than one security complex because the security needs of states have increased and diversified with the accelerating speed of globalisation.

4. Assessment of Armenia–Iran relations within the context of the theory of securitisation

Before it had even declared independence, Armenia had already initiated military action in Nagorno-Karabakh. This whole question remains as yet unresolved and, as a live ongoing issue, provides continuity to a political partnership in Armenia which comprises the army, politicians originating from Nagorno-Karabakh (Caucasus Elections Watch, 2013),[2] and nationalist parties/organisations such as the Dashnak party who always view conflict as ideologically legitimate. Armenians of the diaspora, who maintain a constant and vivid discourse concerning the genocide, which they view as their sole link with their Armenian identity (Okutan, 2003: 79–90), provide diplomatic and economic support for this alliance which dominates Armenian politics.

The regime in Iran, meanwhile, is organised under the control of clerics who assert that they are the representatives of true Islam. The government is under the ideological control of the Consultative Assembly (comprised of clerics), the Army, the Revolutionary Guards, and the Basij militias. Any demands for social or political change are either immediately stifled or repressed by force (Yegin, 2013: 47–69). The utterly intransigent and inflexible response encountered by the leaders and supporters of the Green Movement, who were critical of the current governmental/ideological structure during the presidential election of 2009, gives some indication of the difficulty of voicing any demand for political change in this country (Bakhash, 2013: 4–5). Buzan's observation that those who take a realist view of security are those interested in maintaining the existing military focus certainly seems to fit the situations in Iran and Armenia. It seems quite natural for these kinds of authoritarian regimes, generally resistant to change, to act in partnership and to harmonise their interests.

The idea of securitisation provides valuable assistance in explaining the existing political systems in both Armenia and Iran. Those who govern Armenia assert that

[2] The current president Serge Sarkissian is also a politician from Nagorno-Karabakh.

the Armenian national identity and the territory of Armenia are under threat from Turkey and Azerbaijan, and that Armenian national identity can only be defended through the adoption of an uncompromising posture which prioritises military security. The achievement of any solution which might satisfy both sides in Nagorno-Karabakh is rendered impossible by Armenia's securitisation of this region as integral to its own societal identity, and by equating the security of Nagorno-Karabakh with the political security of the state and people as a whole. The same also applies to Armenia's foreign policy which sets its compass by the genocide. Armenian society refers to the events of 1915 as genocide. The genocide discourse has been subject to cross-generational societal securitisation which has shaped Armenian national identity to the extent that Armenians living all around the world can be expected to find common cause and common ground in the matter of the genocide. Armenia, which is the representative of the Armenian national identity in the international arena, shifts this societal securitisation into the political field.

The situation in Iran is comparable with that in Armenia. Following the Islamic Revolution, an authoritarian political structure under the tutelage of clerics was established through the *Wilayat al-Faqih* (The Guardianship of the Jurists), and Iran then witnessed the development of a societal/political construct which was securitised as the keystone of Iranian identity and of Shi'ite belief in order to maintain the continuity of the regime. Iran, which grounded its securitisation on sectarian basis rather than on ethnic identity, presented itself as the political leader of Shi'ism. By doing so, it placed Iranian society under the burden of maintaining the leadership of the Shi'ite community, which in practice means protecting the existing political structure. The Revolutionary Guards and the *Basij* militias, both of which are "civilian-based" organisations, also contribute to the effort to ensure that the structure created by the Islamic Revolution in Iran is protected by a popular-based species of legitimisation/securitisation (Sinkaya, 2011: 123–155). The Iranian regime's characterisation of the US as the "great Satan" (Tabaar, 2006: 20–45) seeks to inculcate in its own population the illusion that Iran has been engaged in a battle with "Satan and his allies" and in this way it seeks to establish a presumption that all Iranians must act in concert with the regime.

The dominant political culture in Armenia is nationalism, a nationalism which makes reference to the historic territories of Armenia. The institutionalised regime, partnered by politicians and figures who originate from Nagorno-Karabakh (currently under Armenian occupation), soldiers, and diaspora Armenians (Jaloyan, 2009) deploys elements which are fundamental to Armenian identity such as Nagorno-Karabakh and the genocide, in order to maintain the continuity of their own political leadership, and to ensure that their own views are accepted by Armenian society as a whole, thereby sustaining their continued societal/political legitimisation.

The Iranian regime asserts that Iran is the most important political embodiment of Shi'ism and that this is why it has to assume the role of leadership of worldwide Shi'ism. It securitises the Islamic Revolution and the existing *status quo* by reference to a thesis that Sunnis (and also foreign actors interpreted in religious terms as "Satan") are the enemies of Iran (Barzegar, 2008: 87–99). Thus they use religious discourses which provoke a powerful response in society to ensure the continuity of rule by the clergy, the military, and the state bureaucracy, fictionalised as a regency acting on behalf of true Islam.

Even a brief assessment of the five main security sectors identified by Barry Buzan shows that the convergence between Armenia and Iran has a certain logic. In terms of military security, Armenia perceives itself as under threat from Azerbaijan and Turkey, and holds that its security depends on Russian assistance (Minassian, 2008). But so recently Armenia has begun to display some interest in balancing and moderating its military and economic dependence on Russia. The cooperation developed by Turkey and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, including Georgia to some extent (Baran, 2004: 279–280),[3] has pushed Armenia in the direction of military cooperation with a regional actor other than Russia, and that actor is Iran. Russia, for its part, does not oppose to the military cooperation sought by Armenia with Iran. Russia is also interested in obtaining the support of Iran to balance the South Caucasian alliance comprising Azerbaijan and Georgia, backed by the Euro-Atlantic Alliance under the leadership of Turkey. Iran also takes a positive view of the development of military cooperation with Armenia, because, quite apart from the existing military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey, there is also talk of possible military cooperation by those actors with Israel (Abilov, 2009: 138–156). This inclines Iran, which perceives itself as under threat by Israel, to take a favourable view of a military partnership with Armenia, and Russia's favourable view of this cooperation gives Iran further confidence in going down this path. A similar picture appears when one looks at the economic sector. In regional economic terms, Armenia finds itself in a rather lonely position, isolated from the energy, trade and transportation projects upon which Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan are collaborating. Indeed, Armenia is almost entirely dependent upon Russia for energy resources, but has to maintain those trade and economic links via Georgia—with which Russia is in dispute. When this route was briefly interrupted during the Russia–Georgia War in August 2008, it became very obvious to Armenia that it was going to have to create other options for itself (Sanamyan, 2011), and Iran was clearly a potential candidate. Iran is useful to Armenia in the area of energy, but there is also a good fit in the economic and commercial field. Iran is in major dispute with Azerbaijan over the sharing of petroleum and natural gas deposits in the Caspian Sea (Terzioğlu, 2008: 26–45). This means that Armenia's search for economic cooperation has benefits for Iran in that it offers some relief to the embargo imposed upon it, and also permits to increase its regional effectiveness with energy and transport projects (Moniquet &

[3] It is known that the Turkish Army provided arms and support to the Georgian Army.

Racimora, 2013: 7–8).[4] The securitisation referred by Buzan, as we have previously stated, is achieved by using societal forms of legitimisation such as those based on sectarian affiliation, as well as ethnic/national identity, presenting Turkey and Azerbaijan as the threats in the case of Armenia, and presenting Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, and the US as the threats in the case of Iran.

The permanent securitisation maintained by Armenia on the basis of ethnic distinction, and by Iran on the basis of religious/sectarian difference, keeps all socio-cultural, economic or lifestyle-related dissatisfactions experienced in those countries off the political agenda. The perception that security is always desirable and always has to be protected has become ingrained in the societal consciousness of both countries, and this ensures the continuity of the existing regimes which have drawn identity-related issues, both ethnic and religion-based, to the centre of the security understanding. That is to say, societal presumptions associated with the term security can ensure the continuity of authoritarian regimes which would otherwise be unacceptable by normal standards of good governance. The plight of the opposition under Levon Ter Petrossian in the Armenian presidential elections in 2008 (Tüysüzoğlu, 2013: 240–245) and the vigorous suppression of the Green Movement in the Iranian presidential elections in 2009 are both prime examples of this mechanism.

A securitisation is managed by means of discourse within the framework of a process conducted between subjects. The reference objects used by the Armenian regime are: the security of Nagorno-Karabakh, deemed to be part of the historic territory of Armenia; guarantees for the safety of Armenians living in these territories; ensuring that these lands are a viable home for the Armenians living there; and conclusively proving the historic assault on Armenian identity by achieving Turkey's admission of the genocide (Okur, 2010: 13–34).[5]

The actors, who are applying securitisation by means of the discourse are the nationalist parties, politicians and élites; the bureaucracy; the military; and politicians originating from Nagorno-Karabakh. The functional actors who have an indirect role in the securitisation are: the diaspora who keep the genocide discourse alive; Russia (upon which Armenia considers itself overly dependent because of its isolation in the region); and local and foreign companies who derive a profit from the current situation.

In Iran, the reference objects at stake in the securitisation are the belief that Shi'ite Islam is under threat; the belief that Western actors, including the US in particular, wish to attack Iran and bring it low just as Iraq and Syria have been brought low, and thereby ending Iran's political sovereignty. The actors interested in applying this securitisation are: the *Wilayat al-Faqih* represented by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; the Consultative Assembly which is composed of clergy, the Iranian military; the Revolutionary Guards; the Basij militia; and the state bureaucracy (Nader, 2013; Sadjadpour, 2009). Functional actors who wish to see Iran maintain this position include Russia, because of its systemic concerns, and Armenia because of its search for a regional alliance.

The media play a key role in structuring societal and political securitisation in both Iran and Armenia. In Iran, ideological censorship is imposed across the media as a whole. A special court is entirely devoted to monitoring the Iranian media, and any media organ can be readily intimidated because if they publish anything that runs contrary to the ideology (that is to say, which expresses any alternative view of those matters on which the state has applied a process of securitisation), they can be summarily fined, closed down, or their licences will be withdrawn. An overwhelming majority of Iranian society (up to 80%) use the state media as their main source of news. This means, the majority of the Iranian population are fully aware of and informed about those issues to which the state wishes to draw their attention, but simultaneously completely uninformed about any matter which might challenge or undermine the authorities (Sepehri, 2007; Tezcür, 2010).[6] Television channels, and radio and internet sources, unlike the news agencies and newspapers, do challenge the societal security, albeit to a very limited extent. Public do have some opportunity, using satellite dishes in their homes, to follow the news more objectively by looking at opposition, which they may be able to pick up, but this is also monitored relentlessly by the regime (Bakeer & Dinçer, 2011; Tribune, 2012).[7]

Armenians form the most important Christian minority in Iran. The Armenian publication *Alik* is the second most long-standing publication in Iran after *Ettela'at*. This newspaper, which receives economic support from the Iranian Ministry of Culture, is very important to Iranian Armenians, and through such channels Iran endeavours to

[4] In addition to various other joint economic initiatives agreed between Iran and Armenia in 2009, their agreement on the construction of a hydro-electric power plant on the Arax river, the modernisation of the energy infrastructure on Armenia–Iran border, the construction of a petroleum pipeline from Iran to Armenia and the construction of a 470 km railway between the two countries is very important in terms of economic cooperation. Parallel with this agreement, discussions are also ongoing between Armenia and Iran on the signature of a free trade agreement.

[5] This aspiration, referred to by the expression Greater Armenia, encompasses, in addition to the territory of the contemporary state of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Anatolia and the Javakheti region of Georgia. Clearly this would be a long term goal and in reality probably impossible to achieve, but it nevertheless has genuine currency in Armenia and among the diaspora.

[6] One should provide just a few examples of the extent of manipulation of the media in Iran, and its securitisation in line with the interests of the regime. One might point first of all to the Fars News Agency which presents itself as Iran's leading independent news agency, competing with CNN, but is known to be very close to the Revolutionary Guards, as is the Mashregh news agency also. The Mehr news agency and a number of other agencies with names prefaced with "Iran" are coordinated by various organs of the Iranian regime. While the Tehran Times, Keyhan, Entekhab and dozens of other newspapers are directly aligned with the regime, publications like Etemaad and Aftab e Yazd, the most important representatives of the reformist wing, are under very tight control and subject to relentless censorship.

[7] A number of television channels such as the Marjan TV Corporation and the Persian Broadcasting Company broadcast by satellite from countries which are not on good terms with Iran, such as the United Kingdom and the US. Iran's response to these channels is PRESS TV.

bring its Armenian citizens into line with its own securitised perceptions. The *Alik* group also owns printing facilities, and is currently seeking to establish a TV channel. *Alik* is the only Armenian language newspaper published in Iran, but the Armenian weekly literary and cultural magazine *Arax* is also published and distributed, with state support, in those areas where most Iranian Armenians are found such as Tehran, Isfahan and north-eastern Iran (Moniquet & Racimora, 2013: 6–7). This attitude on the part of the Iranian establishment is a component of its policy to ensure the loyalty of Armenian citizens to the regime, and assists the process of partnership with Armenia.

There is a comparable situation in Armenia. Here too the media plays a critical role in extending societal securitisation. Tight control is exerted over the whole of the media, both publicly and privately owned, including organs such as *Yerkir,* the newspaper of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, internet-based news sources such as *Hrazdan*, *PanArmenian* and *Tert* as well as *Radio Yerevan*, *Shoghakat TV* (recognised as the media outlet of the Armenian Orthodox Church), *Hrazdan TV*, Armenian State Television and *Armenia TV* (Mikaelian, 2011; Pearce, 2011). The securitisation structured on a discourse relating to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the genocide propagated by the broad political coalition also affects the media. Media is directed towards keeping the Turkish-Azerbaijani threat permanently on the agenda, thereby keeping the attention of the Armenian population focused on a single issue, and legitimising the occupation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Alongside the media, political parties also have an important role in securitisation. No political party can participate in political life in Iran unless it explicitly accepts the current configuration of the state, and this acceptance has to be approved by the Council of the Guardians. It is generally acknowledged that parties and politicians on both the conservative and reformist wings are kept under close control, but in terms of political ideology, there is not much to choose between them. A number of parties and groups who refused to accept this process either left the country or were driven out (Katzman, 2013).[8]

The parties, for whom Armenia's current security-oriented foreign policy is a non-negotiable item, form the majority in the parliament. In addition to the ruling Republican Party, political parties such as the Prosperous Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Rule of Law, and the Heritage have a broadly nationalist agendas in that they make identity a political issue. They position themselves as socialist, liberal or centrist but in fact there is not a great deal of difference between them. The most significant force of change in the Armenian Parliament is the Armenian National Congress formed in 2008 by 13 political parties and led by Levon Ter Petrossian (Lorusso, 2013). This coalition, which focuses on economic matters and on broadening freedoms rather than on identity issues and security-orientated policies, is very closely monitored and under pressure from the government.

If societal security is the defence of an identity against a perceived threat, then any areas where the boundaries of societies and states do not coincide deserve close attention. It is clear that issues of this kind in Armenia and Iran are among the most significant of the factors that are driving the two into regional partnership. The Nagorno-Karabakh region currently occupied by Armenia has, since the time of the USSR, hosted a substantial Armenian population. It is reported that during the period under the USSR, the Armenian and Azeri populations in this region lived without serious intercommunal problems, but when it became apparent that the region was to pass to Azerbaijan, the Armenians entered a state of alarm. The fact that the boundaries of Armenian society did not coincide with the section of territories which were to be allocated to Armenia provoked a clash between the Armenians and the Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh, and this clash was aggravated by interventions by the national states, culminating in the occupation. In the course of this occupation, the whole of the territory surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, where the overwhelming majority had been of Azeri ethnicity (Yılmaz & Ismayilov, 2011: 4),[9] came under occupation. A similar situation applies for Iran. Today, the Azeris form the majority of the population in the northwest of Iran. Indeed, Azeri nationalists even refer to this region as Southern Azerbaijan (Kamrani, 2009: 147–151). The emergence of a national state called Azerbaijan after the breakup of the USSR, and the aspirations within this country and among those of Azeri ethnicity in Iran to establish a united state of what might be termed Greater Azerbaijan was a source of some unease for Iran (Shaffer, 2013; Souleimanov & Ditrych, 2007: 101–116). The fact that the object of societal/political securitisation for both Iran and Armenia is the same tends to push both of them towards partnership in terms of regional security.

Elements such as migration, horizontal competition and vertical competition have played an important role in securitisation (Waever, 2008: 158–164).[10] Looked at in this way, it appears that the immigration seen in Armenia because of the economic crisis it has experienced, is being politically securitised as an important societal problem. Considered in historical terms, the forced migration experienced by Ottoman Armenians in 1915 formed one of the most important components of the Armenian national identity (Aghajanian, 2009: 34–41; Avagyan, 2012: 203–214; Özdoğan & Kılıçdağı, 2012), and Turks/Turkey began to be characterised as aggressive enemies or aggressively opposed to all things Armenian. During the breakup of the USSR, Armenians living in Azerbaijan in particular, unable to locate themselves within the Azeri national identity, were obliged to migrate, and this, combined with the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, resulted in Armenian society resorting to societal securitisation against Azeris and

[8] The People's Mojahedin of Iran, the Iranian National Front, the Fedayeen and the Iranian Constitutional Party are all political parties which are active abroad and also have significant support within Iran.

[9] The Azeri territories under occupation, together with Nagorno-Karabakh, amount to 20% of the area of Azerbaijan.

[10] Horizontal competition is the process by which a society with progressively increasing geographical and political influence begins to affect another society's language and culture. Vertical competition, however, is the complete abandonment of a former identity, by resort to a social securitisation with a more narrow scope.

Azerbaijan. The same is not applicable, however, to Armenian society in Iran. During the time of the Shah, and also after the Islamic Revolution, Armenian society accommodated itself to whichever was the current regime and did not seek to assert any claims to autonomy. This situation helped to lay the societal groundwork for the convergence of Armenia and Iran.

When assessed in terms of horizontal competition, Nagorno-Karabakh is a focus of consciousness for Armenians. The risk that Nagorno-Karabakh, viewed by Armenians as an inseparable historical element was likely to be left to Azerbaijan, galvanised the Armenians. Iran is prey to similar fears. Iran has a very large population coming from the Azeri ethnicity. The fact that a significant portion of this population lives in north-western Iran, centred around the city of Tabriz and forming the majority in that area, results in a societal/political securitisation on the part of Iran with regard to the Azeris, based on a concern that the region might seek separation from Iran in order to unify with Azerbaijan.

Growth rate of population also matters to securitisation. Armenian and ethnic Iranian populations are slowing, or indeed beginning to shrink. The population of Armenia in July 2013 was 2.9 million, with nearly half (46%) aged 25–54, indicating that the population has begun to age. The annual mean population increase is 0.14% (CIA, 2013a, 2013b). By contrast, the population of Azerbaijan, the nation which Armenia perceives to be an enemy, was over 9.5 million in July 2013. The majority of the population in Azerbaijan is in the 25–54 age range, but 22.6% are in the 1–14 age range. According to 2013 statistics, the rate of population increase in Azerbaijan, at 1.01%, is very much higher than that of Armenia (CIA, 2013a; 2013b). The fact that Azeris outstrip the Armenians in terms of population is a cause of securitisation of the Armenians against the Azeris.

The same also applies for Iran. No clear figure is available to indicate what proportion of the Iranian population is of Turkic origin, but it has been claimed that there are at least 20 million and perhaps as many as 35 million people of Turkic origin in Iran, with Azeris making up the largest group (Akdeniz, 2008; Gökdağ & Heyet, 2004: 51–84).

The Khojaly massacre committed by Armenians against Azeris, and also the forced migration of a million Azeris from the territory of Azerbaijan which was occupied by Armenian armed forces, are indications of a demand for the establishment of a homogeneous population, with securitisation on the basis of Armenian identity. In a comparable incident, a pogrom was inflicted against Armenians by Azeris in Sumgait (Cornell, 1999: 14–15; Kaufman, 1998). In Iran, however, efforts are made to build identity on religion rather than ethnicity in order to avoid societal groups such as Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, and Arabs securitising on the basis of ethnicity.

In this context, any discourse of ethnic securitisation of Azeri and Baluch people in particular is very closely monitored, and measures are taken to repress and confound any such initiatives (BBC, 2010; Boladai, 2010; Jahani, 2004). The interest in establishing homogeneous populations may be based on different referents in Armenia and Iran, but the fact that both countries are engaged in such activities is a factor which promotes their convergence.

Religion is a potentially powerful factor in societal securitisation. Religion can function as a separator in legitimising securitisation and distinguishing different social groups. Very clear examples of this process were witnessed in the Balkans during the break-up of Yugoslavia (Sekulic et al., 2006: 797–827). Looking at religion within the process of securitisation in Armenia, it is, of course, uncontentious to say that Christian Armenians and Muslim Azeris separate themselves by a religious dividing line. In such a context, religion is used as a referent for national identity. In Iran, on the other hand, since the majority of Azeris are Shi'ite, the state emphasises a commonality shared by Azeris and the Iranian state in sectarian affiliation, in order to head off any tendency Azeris may have to act on the basis of an ethnic or national identity. Armenians distinguish themselves from Azeris on the basis of religion, using religion as a separator for the purpose of securitisation, while in Iran, the precise opposite is true. Iran uses religion in order to prevent any Azeri separatism based on ethnic/national identity.

One of the most important aspects explaining the cooperation between Iran and Armenia is the aspect what Barry Buzan describes as regional security complex. A regional security complex which establishes alliances reflects the mutual dependency in the face of a common threat and links the security of the countries/peoples participating in those alliances. The cooperation which has developed recently between Armenia and Iran is a manifestation of just such a regional security complex. Both actors apply a societal securitisation to Azeri national identity and to the state of Azerbaijan. Armenia is regionally isolated and Iran is systemically isolated so both actors have sought to meet some of their needs by collaboration on matters such as trade, energy, transport and regional security. Iran gets a new market for its energy resources while Armenia, cut off from the commercial traffic of the South Caucasus, relieves its economic trouble, at least to some extent, by access to an export market. The two states, which are developing a partnership based on mutual dependence in energy and commerce, also pursue cooperation in the field of security against Azerbaijan that viewed as their common enemy. The partnership between Armenia and Iran which is supported by Russia, can also be viewed as an initiative to provide a power balance against another regional security complex—the ongoing cooperation between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan—but it must be noted that this alliance is legitimising regional polarisation in the South Caucasus and consolidating societal securitisation.

5. Conclusion

The theory of securitisation makes an important contribution to the evaluation of relations between Armenia and Iran. One must conclude that the most important factor underlying the cooperation of Iran and Armenia is that both perceive Azeri and Turkish identities and their respective national states as threats to Iranian and Armenian societal and political security. Securitisation of Armenian and Iranian identity is the most important tool of the regimes in those countries for the maintenance of their own legitimacy

and continuity. This is because any element, which the state claims to be effectively defending against an ongoing threat to ethnic or religious identity, cannot be retrieved from the domain of security or opened up for discussion as part of normal political debate.

Ruling groups in Armenia and Iran are using certain élites in order to promote a transmissibility of discourse between the subjects, and they are also linking elements such as the media, education and political parties into their own discourse. Regimes (that is, the securitising actors) which use competing referent objects of alternative identity such as Nagorno-Karabakh and South Azerbaijan draw in the Armenian and Iranian peoples, (that is, the target masses) by means of discourse. Meanwhile Russia and the diaspora Armenians can be seen as the most important functional actors affected by this securitisation.

When it appeared that Nagorno-Karabakh was to pass to Azerbaijan, the Armenians, who perceive the forced migration to which they were subjected during the Ottoman period in 1915 to be the keystone of their ethnic identity, assumed that they would be unable to withstand horizontal competition with Azeri identity and occupied the territory. A similar situation prevails in north-western Iran, where any supervention of Azeri ethnic identity over Iranian identity is unthinkable for Iran. The fact that both countries are seeking to create societies which are homogeneous in their own respective terms (Armenia, by reference to ethnic/national identity and Iran by reference to religious/sectarian identity) is one more common factor. The situation in north and north-western Iran, as with the Nagorno-Karabakh question, provides further evidence that locations where borders of states and the borders of societies do not coincide can be an important securitising factor. The most important matter contributing to convergence between Armenia and Iran is the fact that in both Nagorno-Karabakh and in north-western Iran, Azeris create problem for both of the countries. Rapid population growth in Azerbaijan and also among the Azeris of Iran also draws Armenia and Iran closer together in their engagement in the same forms of securitisation.

Armenia–Iran alliance can be understood within the framework of systemic and regional demands, but in terms of the securitisation approach of the Copenhagen School, it appears to be an attempt to establish a regional security complex. Similar societal/political reflexes operating in these two countries (Iran is systemically and Armenia is regionally isolated) have prompted them to resort to securitisation against the same societal groups. The result is establishing a regional security complex based on mutual interdependence around an axis of shared interests and threats. Indeed, some steps have already been made with the signing of cooperation agreements focused on energy, trade and transport, suggesting that in the future these two states will be integrating their respective security arrangements, with the support and encouragement of Russia. This will, in effect, be a response to the regional security complex formed in the South Caucasus by Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The outcome of this alliance will be the development of a new security bloc bringing, in its turn, intensified regional competition and polarisation.

Notes on contributor

Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu received his PhD in International Relations from Istanbul University in 2012. He is currently a research assistant in the Department of International Relations at Giresun University. His research interests include Turkish Foreign Policy and Wider Black Sea Region.

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